



EVOLUTION OF AN INDUSTRY PART I

Development of Massage as a Viable Therapy

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The Spa and Massage Industry has exploded into the Asian market. The demand for professionally trained and highly skilled therapists is extreme. Unfortunately on an international scale the skill and knowledge-base generally speaking across Asia needs rapid development. Many 5-star international resorts seek western-style specialists to manage and train their staff.

It is unfortunate at this present time that there does not seem to be enough local staff with management and therapy skills to fill this need.

It would seem the Spa Industry is developing much quicker than the capacity to adequately train therapists with professional and sound skills incorporated with client care aspects that, at this current time, seem to have little focus in the Asian Spa and Salon market.

The Australian market for massage has developed into areas of a more clinical environment and then, as the Resort and Tourism market expanded, into the Spa industry. Massage lays its foundations across many continents and has been a part of a variety of cultures used to maintain health. Now in the 21st Century clinical massage can be validated by sound investigation and by evidence based research.

Massage is Popular!

One thing is for sure, massage is not only popular but at this current time the full understanding of its benefits has not been realised in the Asian Spa industry. Driven by tourism the majority of high-end resorts offer Spa services of which massage is often seen as the most popular treatment. Massage is popular! Smaller spa and beauty salons abound in every city and town across Asia, also attracting local clients for Spa services at more affordable rates.

The development of this industry has been driven by a need of clients who seek these services to not only de-stress, but feel better in themselves. Many clients frequent spas and salons to gain the many benefits available from treatments.

The massage industry in Australia started to gain popularity in the early 1980's. During these days professional training was available however no regulated standards for the industry had been developed. Massage through the '80s and through the '90s rapidly developed due to the popularity of people wanting to learn to effectively assist others and themselves with bodywork. Currently statistics show that around 68% of the Australian population has utilised the services of a Natural Therapy Practitioner. This is astounding as up until more recent times, massage was not subsidised in any way, clients having to pay substantial amounts for a treatment. These days in Australia a client seeking the services of a qualified therapist for a massage treatment can claim a rebate for the service from their chosen health fund insurance scheme.

I see the massage industry in Asia at a similar position that Australia was in during the 1980's, ie. no regulated standard, poor knowledge-based education and relatively little awareness of many client care aspects. Given the interest in this industry across Asia I suggest it is only a matter of time until the benchmark starts to rise perhaps driven by western tourists who have become connoisseurs of massage and bodywork treatments in their home countries.



Development of Massage as a Viable Therapy cont.

As I travel around Asia presenting seminars on "How to Grow your Spa/Salon Business" and overseeing professionally qualified massage trainings offered by the School of Integrated Body Therapy it is glaringly obvious that there is a need for development in the therapists ability to understand the many aspects of a massage treatment and how to make decisions in regard to a client's specific health or physical needs. Generally speaking across Asia, massage treatments are "routine based" or the same treatment for every client. The industry needs to change it's focus on the effectiveness of a treatment and the therapists need training in the understanding of the intention of a treatment. Sadly this awareness seem to be lacking at this present time.

A Whole New World

There is a new and exciting market for massage treatments available but often unseen at this present time. This new massage market is basically what is common in most western countries. It is the massage treatment market not the massage relaxation market, meaning that the therapist who has been well trained can create individual and specific treatment plans to meet an individual client's own health or postural needs. At this present time the prime market in Asia is massage for relaxation. Trendy terms like "indulgence massage" or treatments incorporating Aromatherapy are inviting the client to relax. It's not to say these treatments are not beneficial or enjoyable, it is to say that there is another need that can be filled by the massage industry. In the West, particularly in countries like Australia, the main massage market is treatment-based massage therapy. Currently at the Lake Spa Healing, Therapy & Education Centre, NSW, Australia, 95% of our clients seek Remedial Therapy Massage and only 5% seek Relaxation. In Australia many seek the services of a clinical massage environment whilst at home, but still enjoy the experience of a relaxation massage during their resort or holiday breaks.

Clients will pay to get well. In the treatment based therapy market clients often need to attend between 6 to 15 treatments to create a healing or remedying effect that is long-standing. This style of treatment may also be called pain management. This number of treatments may appear excessive to the uninitiated however a therapy that works and eases discomfort will always be highly sought after no matter how many treatments are required and no matter what the cost. Basically speaking, the majority of people really desire to feel well and mobile. After initial success of treating then it is recommended that clients use massage to maintain their health by having minimally 1 treatment per month for the rest of their lives. This is good business and very different from the Relaxation market where a client may have one treatment a year or so. Of course not all clients will take this style of treatment regime to save money or time. It is not unusual to see a client returning 2 years later with the same condition that was initially treated because they have not taken the personal responsibility to maintain their functional health and simply have a remedial massage treatment on a monthly or regular basis.

During the early '80s in Australia, professional Natural Therapy and Massage Associations began to develop. This development occurred out of the need to provide structure, ethics and direction for an industry that was gaining popularity. As the industry developed, so did the Professional bodies that led the industry forward by setting educational standards, codes of practices which included ethical boundaries in relation to treating clients. The professional associations role was to not only oversee it's member therapists, but also to evaluate the educational standards of training institutions.

So popular has been the natural therapies and massage industry in Australia that the Australian Government, due to this popularity, decided there was a need to take a closer look at this industry that was so popular amongst it's population.



Development of Massage as a Viable Therapy cont.

During the late 90's the Australian National Training Authority in co-operation with major professional associations, created a National Health Training Package standard that Registered Training Organisations had to abide by. The Training Package was based on competency or vocational skill outcomes and not on a theoretical basis. With this Government interest the majority of health insurance funds in Australia now pay significant rebates to clients who seek a variety of services at a Spa or Massage Clinic. In Australia practitioners need to have evidence that they have been adequately trained by a reputable training organisation and that they have met certain standards before they are accepted for membership by professional Associations like the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS). ATMS is the largest multi-modality professional association in Australia and currently has some 13,000 qualified practitioners.

Australia has an aging population, many choosing to take responsibility for their own health use regular massage and bodywork services. These services provide not only many health benefits but also encourage mobility, circulation and mental clarity.

In many countries in Asia massage is considered quite lowly and often associated with the sex industry. During the early 1980's Australian massage therapists invited the same confusion or criticism. As the Asian Spa and Massage Industry develops so will develop a different attitude. The change in attitude will certainly be encouraged with an increase of knowledge and Client Care skills by massage therapists.

Background of School of Integrated Body Therapy, Australia Pty Ltd (SIBT)

The largest specialty massage school in Australia, established in 1985. During SIBT's growth it has aided and witnessed the evolution of massage as a highly respected, viable profession in Australia. These years of experience have allowed SIBT to develop and offer reliable and sound skills-based professional training. SIBT's philosophy embraces a wholistic approach to healing, wellbeing and recovery through massage and bodywork.

SIBT provides cutting edge training with a focus on the latest hands-on techniques and skills. SIBT is an Australian Government Registered Training Organisation and is accredited by three major Australian professional associations:

- Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS),
- Association of Massage Therapists (AMT),
- Reflexology Association of Australia (RAA).

SIBT currently has the assistance of the Australian Trade Commission to export education and has successfully completed over 22 courses throughout Asia over the last 3 years.

The School's website is www.massageschool.com.au

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Maggie is a Life Member of the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS) and has been an Executive Director of ATMS for 18 years, 9 of those years as Vice President. ATMS is the largest professional association for the Natural Therapies Industry in Australia. She has been structurally and politically involved in the development of the Massage profession in Australia. Maggie is also the Founder/Director of Lake Spa Healing, Therapy & Education Centres, Australia, and has an ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge throughout the world and assisting other countries to raise educational standards and awareness in regard to massage as a viable health and wellness therapy and for its treatment of pain and dysfunction.

